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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 001252

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: LEFTIST PARTIES POISED TO BOYCOTT LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. MINSK 1241

[1](#)B. MINSK 1235

[1](#)C. MINSK 1109

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Leftist opposition parties Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) and Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) "Gramada" intend to boycott the January 2007 local elections on the grounds that participating in a rigged process is pointless. A senior BPC member admitted to Pol/Econ Chief that her party backtracked on its earlier commitment to remain in the race but noted that party members from the regions pushed the party in this new direction. While the leftist parties recognize the lost opportunity to deepen contact with voters, party members apparently have determined that the personal risks involved outweigh the benefits. The impact of this step on the unity of the democratic coalition has yet to be determined but will include at a minimum a more confused electorate. End Summary.

Opposition Communists To Withdraw from Local Elections

[1](#)2. (C) On December 2, the pro-democratic Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) voted to boycott the January 14 municipal elections during a party convention. BPC Deputy Head Yelena Skregin stressed to Pol/Econ Chief on December 5 that withdrawal from the elections was not on the agenda of the party convention; rather, regional delegates raised the possibility of a boycott as a point of discussion. The debate was apparently "heated and intense," but in the end, 51 out of 52 delegates voted in favor boycotting the elections following the candidate registration period, which ends on December 14.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Skregin, delegates cited three main reasons for boycotting the elections. First, delegates' well-placed GOB contacts at local and regional levels allegedly confirmed for them that the GOB has already determined the list of winners of the local elections (ref A). Second, the GOB did not select any of the BPC's nominees for the election commissions. Finally, President Lukashenko's November 23 blatant admission that his government manipulated the results of the March presidential elections was a clear signal to election officials to secure another "thunderous victory" for the regime in the upcoming local elections (ref B).

[1](#)4. (C) Pol/Econ Chief told Skregin that this decision came as a surprise to us because BPC Chair Sergey Kalyakin

personally assured Ambassador two months ago that his party would participate in the local elections (ref C). Skregin noted that during the convention Kalyakin pointed out the fundamental disadvantage of boycotting the elections -- less contact with voters -- but she conceded that Kalyakin's position had changed. Kalyakin noted that a noble exit from the race after BPC candidates were registered would show that the party enjoyed popular support but is not willing to be a pawn of the regime. Furthermore, Kalyakin reportedly made it clear to all party members that the party will not prohibit candidates remaining in the electoral race.

Kozulin's Party Follows Suit

15. (C) Anatoly Levkovich, Acting Chairman of imprisoned leader Aleksandr Kozulin's Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) "Gramada," confirmed for us on December 5 that the party leadership recommended that BSDP candidates withdraw from the electoral race. Levkovich echoed BPC's reasons for boycotting the elections but noted that the party left the final decision on participation in the elections with each BSDP candidate.

Further Contact With Voters?

16. (C) Skregin admitted that withdrawal from the elections would prohibit the party from legally campaigning against the Lukashenko regime. However, she qualified that candidates are allowed to engage in an open campaign only for a month, from December 14 to January 14. Prior to December 14, many of the candidates participating in the boycott intend to knock on the doors of voters who signed their candidate registration sheets to explain their reasons for withdrawal

MINSK 00001252 002 OF 002

from the race and to encourage them not to take part in the sham. Following the elections, Skregin said her party will begin a door-to-door campaign to gather signatures for a legal repeal of the repressive contract employment system.

Alliance of Leftist Parties

17. (C) The BPC delegates also ratified Kalyakin's proposal to form an alliance of leftist parties, including BCP, BSDP, women's party Nadezhda, and the unregistered Labor Party. When asked what this decision means for the opposition coalition United Democratic Forces (UDF), Skregin stated that the leftist alliance still falls under the rubric of the coalition. However, Skregin noted that the leftist parties could no longer ignore their ideological differences with the right-wing parties and, consequently, decided to focus their attention on a "leftist approach" to democratic change. The leftist alliance plans to hold its first convention on December 17 in Ukraine. (Note: The alliance was going to hold the convention in Minsk, but a local convention hall later withdrew their agreement. End note.)

Comment

18. (C) Skregin seemed unsure that she and her party made the correct decision to boycott the elections. BPC's and BSDP's move clearly suggests that party rank and file are finding it increasingly difficult to participate in rigged municipal elections. Party leaders stress that their members had always approached the upcoming local elections with great trepidation because they feared their participation would only bring further repression on them and their families. Thus far, the leadership of the right and centrist opposition parties have not given any indication they plan to follow the leftist parties' lead on withdrawing from the race.

19. (C) Comment Continued: It is unfortunate that the UDF is

not speaking with one voice on this fundamental issue.
Leftist-rightist disputes within the UDF are nothing new --
both sides can be correctly blamed for letting tensions flare
-- but we now face an unpleasant prospect of some in the UDF
pursuing this political process actively (in the context of
admittedly flawed elections) while others absent themselves.
Whatever the leftists' motives, the result will be that the
Belarusian "electorate" -- which due to state control of the
media already knows precious little about the opposition --
will see the opposition following conflicting political
directions.
Stewart